




UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OFFICE OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

FEB 28 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: All NOAA Offices

FROM: R. N. Bennett 
Acting Director
Acquisitions and Grants Office

SUBJECT: Use of Purchase Cards for Light Refreshments

A recent General Accounting Office (GAO) decision restricts the application of the GSA Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) policy authorizing light refreshments at conferences, which was published in January 2000. Under the new GAO decision, dated January 27, 2003, the GAO states that appropriated funds may not be used to provide light refreshments to federal workers who are not in a travel status without specific statutory authority. ("Use of Appropriated Funds to Purchase Light Refreshments at Conferences, B-288266")

Prior to this decision, the interpretation has been made within the Department and NOAA, based on the GSA policy, that use of appropriated funds for light refreshments at a conference is permitted if at least 50% of the attendees are in travel status. However, this interpretation can no longer be applied.

Effective immediately, NOAA purchase card holders are prohibited from using purchase cards to provide light refreshments at meetings or conferences for employees who are not in a travel status. Exceptions to the rule against paying for food for employees, such as programs under the Training Act and the Incentive Awards Act, are unaffected by this decision.

The decision may be found at: <http://www.gao.gov/decisions/appro/288266.htm>. Additional information on relevant GAO rulings is available on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov/> through the GAO Legal Products. On the Legal Products page, select Volume I of the Principles of Federal Appropriations Law. In addition, the Department's General Law Division may be contacted at (202)482-5391 regarding expenditures of appropriated funds.

Please direct any questions regarding proper use of Government purchase cards to Larry Frazier on 301-713-0836 x138, or to the purchase card APC at your cognizant Administrative Support Center.

